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# Review of public information activities in the United Nations Secretariat outside the Department of Public Information

## Report of the Secretary-General

## I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in accordance with a request of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for a further clarification and definition of what constitutes outputs for public information and for programme implementation in substantive departments and offices. The Committee recommended that the Department of Public Information, as the lead agency, initiate a review of those issues throughout the Secretariat and that it submit its conclusions to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session.[1]

2. The Advisory Committee made its recommendation in the context of its own observation that in some instances the difference between outputs classified as public information and those undertaken as part of the programme of work had become blurred.[1] In this connection, it may be acknowledged that in many instances this is a correct reflection of the facts and that it would require the imposition of an artificial distinction to designate some outputs as being solely of a substantive nature and others as being solely of a public information nature. Indeed, the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation do not attempt to impose such a distinction (ST/SGB/2000/8). Rule 105.4 (a) (ii) provides that output descriptions in the programme narratives shall conform to six standard categories of output, and, while those include substantive activities as a discrete output, there is no designation of a separate category of outputs for public information and activities. Accordingly, a somewhat pragmatic approach to the question of distinguishing substantive and public information outputs would seem to be called for.

3. It may be recalled that, as reflected in section 26 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (A/56/6 (Sect. 26)), the Department of Public Information is given overall responsibility for the public information programme of the Organization. This programme has been mandated by the General Assembly in many resolutions. In addition, the Committee on Information provides programmatic guidance to the Department on an ongoing basis.

4. Also, the programme of activities under section 26 reflects those set out in programme 23, Public information, of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005,[2] in accordance with the priorities established for the Organization as a whole by Member States and as outlined in the Millennium Declaration

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(see General Assembly resolution 55/2). The role of the Department of Public Information is to ensure that communication strategies relating to those priority areas are articulated with one voice, thereby avoiding competing messages and duplication. The Department performs a key function by providing communication expertise and acting as the focal point and coordinator for all United Nations information activities.

5. Close coordination in the field of public information both within the Secretariat and at the level of the United Nations system is essential to promoting an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among the peoples of the world. Without this informed understanding, the United Nations cannot garner the public support necessary to pursue its programmes and objectives. Therefore, the Secretary-General has emphasized the importance of communication, placing it at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization. With the goal of maximizing outreach and avoiding duplication, the Department of Public Information works closely with the other departments, offices and regional commissions and promotes system-wide coordination of public information and communication activities through the Joint United Nations Information Committee.

6. The work of the Department of Public Information is not an end in itself; its raison d'être is to ensure that the substantive work of the United Nations succeeds by ensuring that a global message reaches a worldwide audience and thereby wins support for the Organization. In so doing, the Department represents all of the organizational units of the Secretariat and gives a public face and meaning to the work the United Nations is doing in order to build and sustain public support for the Organization as a whole. To accomplish this objective, the Department has worked closely with all parts of the Secretariat to communicate to the world the host of activities undertaken by the Organization in every field of human activity. It has also continued to formulate specific messages for departments and offices of the Secretariat, systematically incorporating their individual communication goals into its advocacy campaigns.

# II. Summary of public information activities by other organizational units of the Secretariat

7. In an effort to address the issues raised by th Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetar Questions, the Department of Public Informatio initiated a review with the departments and offices o the Secretariat that had included information activitie in the proposed programme budget for the bienniu 2002-2003, as well as with all the regiona commissions. Among those contacted were th Department of Economic and Social Affairs, th Department of Political Affairs, the Department o Peacekeeping Operations, the Department fo Disarmament Affairs, the Office of Legal Affairs an the Office of the High Commissioner for Huma Rights. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations preparing a separate report on its public informatio activities for consideration by the General Assembly its resumed fifty-sixth session. The following ar examples of activities based on the definition o outputs contained in the annex to the Regulations an Rules Governing Programme Planning:

> "Outputs are final products or services delivere by a programme or subprogramme to end-user such as reports, publications, training, servicin of meetings, or advisory, editorial, translation o security services, which an activity is expected t produce in order to achieve its objectives."

## A. Department of Economic and Social Affairs

8. The Department of Economic and Social Affai carries out information activities with the support o the Department of Public Information, including th media launches of major reports such as the *Wor Economic and Social Survey*. In addition, th Department carries out briefings of a technical natu and produces technical publications and other outrea products intended for specialized audiences in t business sector and the academic community as well among specialized non-governmental organizations a broad range of issues. It also manages seve technical web sites and coordinates outreach to t specialized media and to non-governmen organizations active in areas within the purview of t Department.

### B. Office of Legal Affairs

9. The Office of Legal Affairs produces several recurrent specialized publications on topics related to international law, including the *United Nations Juridical Yearbook*, the *United Nations Reports of the International Arbitral Awards*, the *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs* and the *United Nations Legislative Series*. The Office also coordinates activities relating to the teaching, study and wider dissemination of international law to lawyers, policy makers, government officials and those involved in the teaching of international law. In addition, it maintains several specialized web sites and provides speakers on topics relating to international law. It may be recalled that, in cooperation with the Department of Public Information, a promotional campaign was launched in connection with the Millennium Assembly to encourage treaty actions by Member States.

### C. Department of Political Affairs

10. Training workshops for journalists in connection with the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in the Central African Republic are an example of the public information outputs of the Department of Political Affairs. Such workshops help journalists to become more aware of the important role of the media in promoting peace. In addition, the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala carries out public information and communication activities with a view to promoting greater public awareness of the peace agreements and the role of the Mission.

### D. Department for Disarmament Affairs

11. The Department for Disarmament Affairs produces specialized publications, such as the *United Nations Disarmament Yearbook*, *DDA Update* and the occasional papers series, and organizes seminars, symposiums and forums for non-governmental organizations held during Disarmament Week. During the past year, it also worked closely with the Department of Public Information on the development of a communication strategy leading to the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in July 2001, and in the preparation of the Department's documentary entitled *Armed to the Teeth*.

### E. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

12. Advocacy and information management are central to the mandate of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, namely, coordinating the humanitarian response to disasters and emergencies and addressing the specific needs of the humanitarian community, and are an essential and integral part of its core function. Drawing on the information provided by the humanitarian organizations at both the international and field levels, it provides comprehensive information and analysis to its partners in support of their field work. Its two main web-based public information products, ReliefWeb and the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), provide critical, up-to-date information to guide decision-making and day-to-day humanitarian operations. Whereas ReliefWeb, which is more than 80 per cent donor-funded, serves as a tool and guide for the humanitarian community, IRIN (field-based and entirely donor-funded) is a specialized news service aimed at the humanitarian community. The public information work of the Office is intended as a tool to improve the quality and efficiency of information delivery for complex emergencies.

### F. Regional Economic Commissions

13. The regional commissions develop and carry out information activities and programmes relating to their specific mandates with a view to promoting an informed understanding of their work among the key regional constituencies, including Member States and government institutions, as well as the media, non-governmental organizations, United Nations associations and the public at large. Those activities complement the work of the Department of Public Information, including the activities undertaken by United Nations information centres and services in the respective regions.

## III. Results of the review

14. The Department of Public Information regularly provides assistance to departments and offices of the Secretariat in the formulation of communication strategies for their intended audiences. In addition to communication expertise, it provides the departments

and other organizational units with influential communication tools, including the infrastructure available through the network of United Nations information centres and the platform of the United Nations web site. Greater efficiency and effectiveness can be achieved only through continued cooperation between the Department of Public Information and all other parts of the Secretariat. The development of effective communication strategies requires the inclusion of the Department in the decision-making processes of those departments and offices and its participation in the relevant planning meetings from the beginning of the preparatory process. This ensures that the communication angle is taken into account when programmes and activities are being developed.

15. While the substantive departments and offices are specialists on the issues for which they are responsible, they require the expertise of the Department of Public Information to communicate their message in a manner easily understood by the public. It is for this reason that they turn to the Department to tailor their messages to their intended audiences and to develop focused information strategies to effectively communicate their messages using the most appropriate mix of media. As seen from the few examples outlined in paragraphs 8 to 13 above, if departments and offices produce public information materials without seeking the assistance of the Department of Public Information, this is generally because of a specific mandate requiring them to produce technical information products for a specialized, limited audience. Once those products are completed, the Department may assist, if required, in disseminating them to a wider, more general public.

16. The Secretary-General has spearheaded a drive to promote a culture of communication and a spirit of cooperation at all levels of the Organization. To facilitate these goals, he established the Communications Group as a mechanism for high-level coordination on communication issues by senior New York-based information officials. The Joint United Nations Information Committee also functions as a coordinating mechanism, with the Department of Public Information serving as its secretariat. Within the context of the Committee, the Department convenes system-wide task forces to coordinate communication efforts for specific global conferences and campaigns.

17. Coordination and cooperation between the Department of Public Information and other departments and offices of the Secretariat has been enhanced in recent years. Increasingly, the Department has been working closely with them on a daily basis to formulate and disseminate their messages around the world, especially through communication campaigns developed by the Department to promote major global conferences, as well as thematic advocacy campaigns such as the "UN Works" programme.

18. The United Nations information centres play a central role in the dissemination of United Nations information products produced by both the Department of Public Information and United Nations system partners. They serve as the local voice for the global messages of the United Nations and, by articulating major thematic issues in a local context, bring global messages to local audiences. As the results of a comprehensive evaluation of the United Nations information centres conducted in 1996 and 1997 (A/AC.198/1997/6) demonstrated, the centres provide public information services to more than 40 organizations of the United Nations system, devoting an average of five work-months per information centre to this cooperation. By providing public information facilities, logistical infrastructure and contacts with the local partners, in particular media and non-governmental organizations, information centres provide an added value to the United Nations system.

19. The use of new information and communication technologies has become central to the dissemination of information. The Department of Public Information is responsible for managing the contents of the United Nations web site, which it coordinates and maintains with the technical support of the Information Technology Services Division of the Office of Central Support Services. United Nations materials are available via the United Nations web site in all six official languages. In addition, 40 United Nations information centres so far have set up web sites to provide United Nations materials in some 25 local languages. The web site is accessed by users in more than 180 countries. Between 1 January and 19 October 2001, the United Nations web site was accessed more than 1 billion times, with peaks of more than 7 million a day. Earlier this year, under the guidance of the Publications Board, United Nations Internet publishing guidelines were issued (ST/AI/2001/5) setting out the procedures and objectives for the dissemination of United Nations materials over the Internet. The implementation of the guidelines is overseen by the

Publications Board's Working Group on Internet Matters.

## IV. Observations

20. The information received from other organizational units within the Secretariat would indicate that the public information activities they carry out are complementary to those of the Department of Public Information. The Department's ongoing working relationships with other departments and offices and its coordination efforts within the Organization help to reinforce this and minimize duplication of effort and overlap. Further strengthening of partnerships and coordination with all United Nations entities to ensure that a coherent, effective and unified image of the United Nations is projected to the global public remains a continuing priority.

21. Joint efforts between the Department of Public Information and other departments and offices are most successful when the Department is given early warning and is included from the beginning in the preparatory process for major activities. In the same way, enhanced field connectivity and coverage of field activities can best be achieved through the active inclusion of the United Nations information centres at all stages of joint information activities.

22. As outlined above, the Department of Public Information, within its limited resources, provides its expertise to all organizational units of the Secretariat and, as appropriate, to other members of the United Nations system required to communicate the messages of the Organization to the global public. Public information priorities should be part of joint strategic planning among all organizational units of the Secretariat, to be discussed prior to the submission of future programme budget proposals.

*Notes*

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/56/7), para. VII.8.

[2] Ibid., *Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/55/6/Rev.1).